Rabies elimination: protecting vulnerable communities through their dogs

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Bernadette Abela-Ridder and colleagues (November, 2016)[1] describe the commendable joint efforts of WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control to control rabies on a global level, including their endorsement of a global framework to eliminate human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030. Domestic dogs are the main reservoir of infection in regions of Africa and Asia in which human deaths from rabies are highest.[2] As Abela-Ridder and colleagues reinforce, preventing the transmission of rabies in canine populations is crucial. Additionally, surveillance and monitoring of rabies incidence within dog populations will become increasingly important.

The global health community's focus for gauging the threat of rabies should not only include the tragic outcome of human deaths, but also the origin of the problem: unvaccinated canine populations in marginalised communities without access to veterinary care. Most free-roaming dogs in rabies-endemic areas are not feral, and belong to a household,[3] forming an integral part of human communities as working animals and pets. Control and epidemic preparedness requires ongoing awareness of rabies in dogs, as sustainable elimination of human rabies cannot be achieved without elimination of the disease in the world's domestic dogs. Together with mass vaccination of domestic dogs, goals and targets for the elimination of dog rabies must be set, alongside the newly endorsed goal of eradicating human dog-mediated rabies by 2030.

I declare no competing interests

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1 Abela-Ridder B, Knopf L, Martin S, Taylor L, Torres G, De Balogh K. 2016: the beginning of the end of rabies? *Lancet Glob Health* 2016; **4:** e780–81.

2 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Rabies disease control strategy. 2011. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69523/pb13585-rabies-control-strategy-110630.pdf (accessed Oct 16, 2016).

3 Cleaveland S, Dye C. Maintenance of a microparasite infecting several host species: rabies in the Serengeti. *Parasitology* 1995; **111:** S33–47.